

CORRESPONDENCE.

A Method of Obtaining a Temporary Stability of Names.

TO THE EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':

Dear Sirs:—It is within the power of the A. O. U. Committee on Nomenclature to mitigate, temporarily at least, the inconvenience of frequent changing of names and by a simple method to which the most hardened nomenclatural sinner can hardly object. It is by issuing a Check-List once every ten years without the intervening supplements which now so soon make it a thing of shreds and patches even for those who find time to post up their copies. The Check-List mirrors the Committee's approval of certain names and there are many earnest workers who have use for them, but workmen obliged to change their tools too often are not likely to do the best work, especially when the new tools are no better than the old. The latest name is a matter of concern to a very few, an available name is of great use to many. The proposed periods of quiet with distinct times of changes are not incompatible with advance, for facts do not alter with the years and too much change only creates confusion and clogs advance. If, then, a species has for fifty years rested in one genus nobody except the disturber of its rest need be in a hurry to put it in another, nor does a name buried a hundred years in an old volume suffer impairment if allowed to slumber a few years longer, more or less. So to, in the matter of new races, prompt ruling seems undesirable, for it makes them neither better nor worse, and time alone, with further investigation, is required to bring out their real value.

This is no reflection on the good work the Committee has done, but I believe all its judicial thunder might better be saved up for big periodical explosions rather than for small frequent ones. A Check-List in 1910 and at the end of each succeeding decade would disturb no vital principle and such a course might add further dignity and force to the decisions. It seems to me that this is often enough to furnish a new set of tools and I think that there would be less complaint of the instability of nomenclature if the Committee would not rule out or adopt a Check-List name except at stated intervals.

I remain,

Yours very truly,

JONATHAN DWIGHT, JR.